

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Lands in Protected Ownership**

The site significance rankings on Table 1 and in the Site Descriptions portray the biological significance of the sites, but the table does not indicate the amount of protection, if any, known by the NC NHP and by TLC for the site. Protection for a site is indicated in the "Management and Protection" section of each site description.

"Protection" means different things to different persons or agencies. "Protection" implies some form of conservation at a site, such that development and large-scale timber harvest are precluded in the foreseeable future. Sites in public ownership do not necessarily imply a protected status; a landfill or an airport owned by the county should not be considered as protected land. Likewise, flowing waters such as rivers and creeks are public waters "owned by the State of North Carolina", but they should not be considered as "protected" unless specific conservation measures, such as designation as an Outstanding Resource Water or a High Quality Water, have been enacted.

Johnston County is not endowed at the present time with much protected land, especially in comparison with adjacent Wake County, where much public land exists at sites such as Falls Lake (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers), William B. Umstead State Park, and Hemlock Bluffs State Natural Area. There are no Federal parks, refuges, or forests in Johnston County, nor is there a state park unit or state game land. However, the State operates Clemmons State Forest, near Clayton. This forest contained a County significant site until it was heavily impacted by Hurricane Fran in fall 1996. Although some timber harvest may take place from time to time, it should be considered as protected because development of the site is precluded and because it is heavily used by the public for passive outdoor recreation such as picnicking, walking, and environmental education. NC NHP now considers a portion of the State Forest to be only of Local significance.

The most significant area of public land is the 2800-acre Howell Woods Environmental Learning Center, a gift of the Howell family to Johnston Community College (technically, owned by the Trustees of Johnston Community College, and thus not actually in State or county ownership). This site lies almost entirely within the Neuse River floodplain and is considered to be of State significance. As with Clemmons State Forest, the preserve has permanent staff, who manage the property (such as removal of some oaks followed by controlled burns in longleaf pine stands) for wildlife, environmental education, and passive outdoor recreation. The site is the only protected public land in the county within the Neuse River floodplain below I-95.

The second-most significant area of public land is likely the Bentonville Battleground State Historic Site, owned by the State and administered by the Department of Cultural Resources. The historic site now covers more than 100 acres, and the Department has been actively acquiring tracts in recent years. Some of the uplands contain fair- to good-quality sandhills vegetation, and a few streamhead pocosins are also present. Though some battle re-enactments take place on the property, most of the land should be considered to be in protected status.